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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 000197

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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR SECRETARY GATES  
DEPT FOR A/S DAN FRIED

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SECDEF VISIT TO SPAIN

Classified By: Ambassador Eduardo Aguirre for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

11. (C/NF) Mr. Secretary, welcome to Spain. Your visit to Spain will be brief, and it will be focused on NATO issues rather than on the host. Nonetheless, the trip provides an important opportunity to discuss key initiatives with your Spanish counterpart, Defense Minister Jose Antonio Alonso, and to review the bilateral relationship. The US-Spanish relationship under the Zapatero government has provided us with a complex and difficult diplomatic challenge. We seek to maintain and advance our long-term interests in Spain, and finding areas of common interest, with a government that at times sees it in its domestic political interest to distance itself from the United States or disagrees with our strategy.

Nonetheless, Spain under this government continues to provide the US with critical sea and air bases at Rota and Moron just an hour south of Seville. Strategically located to service US interests in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, Moron and Rota welcome hundreds of US ships and thousands of US planes every year - in 2006, an average of more than 15 planes per day and a ship every three days.

12. (C/NF) Constant press and political commentary probe the state of the US-Spain relationship, following President Zapatero's abrupt withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq over three and a half years ago and other irritants. Acting on POTUS instructions, we have focused on longer term US interests in Spain and worked hard to develop a strong, mutually beneficial relationship in defense, counterterrorism, non-proliferation, Counter narcotics, and other priority areas. Spain is an important troop contributor to NATO, EU, and UN missions. It currently has troops deployed in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Lebanon, and their navy is a constant participant in NATO's Operation Active Endeavor. Spain has recently deployed troops in Congo, Haiti, Lithuania, and Pakistan as well. Spain spent some 565 million euros in 2006 on peacekeeping operations. Spain is an important ally and international economic power that is increasingly engaged economically and diplomatically not only in Latin America but also with Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and even Asia.

13. (C/NF) Spanish voters see the world differently than Americans. Thirty years of experience suffering and fighting domestic terrorism - and al-Queda's March 11 2004 bombings of Madrid commuter trains - make many Spaniards think that terrorism is more a legal and police battle than a military one. Spain's neutral stance in World Wars give Spaniards a different understanding of collective security roles and responsibilities. The Spanish military's domestic role during the Franco dictatorship makes many Spaniards

distrustful of the military. The wounds of the brutal Civil War in the 1930s have not completely healed.

¶4. (C/NF) As a result, Spanish public opinion has mixed feelings about NATO. Spain was a latecomer to NATO, and the far left still vocally opposes membership. At the same time, the Spanish military has been a dedicated and able NATO partner. In fact, Spain is the biggest troop contributor to the NATO Response Force, and the first and so far only NRF to deploy when it supplied the NATO earthquake relief mission to Pakistan. Spain has made a significant commitment to its Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Qal-i-Naw and the Forward Support Base at Herat. At the London Conference, Spain committed 150 million euros over five years, and its PRT has moved quickly, working with the local government, to provide water, sewer, electricity, and other basic needs to the people of Badghis province. GOS leaders tell us privately that Spain is there for the long-term, but some in the political leadership resolutely insists on selling the Afghan deployment as a humanitarian and reconstruction mission while downplaying the military component.

¶5. (C/NF) The Spanish military could and should put more boots on the ground in Afghanistan. As it withdraws some troops from the Balkans, Spain is well within its quasi-official deployment ceiling of 3000. The military desperately wants to staff the ISAF XI headquarters, a chance that it lost last year when we moved to a composite headquarters. The problem is at the highest political level, where the governing Socialist Party (PSOE) and the primary opposition Popular Party (PP) treat military deployments and cooperation with US-led efforts as political hot potatoes. President Zapatero was elected in 2004 because of the political aftermath of the Madrid train bombings, but he took

MADRID 00000197 002 OF 003

his unexpected victory as an endorsement of his anti-Iraq war stance, which polls showed was opposed by 90 percent of the public. He sees almost every foreign policy issue through the prism of domestic policy - in particular its impact on his and PSOE's reelection in 2008. His own inclinations and much of his population are pacifist so decisions on troop deployments have been difficult, and Zapatero makes a point to gain parliamentary approval for new missions. Whenever Zapatero has approved putting more troops where they are needed -- leading an Afghanistan PRT, troops in Lebanon, for example -- the right of center PP pillories him as a hypocrite, thus endangering the very action that the US wants him to take. For this reason he has recently rejected deploying additional troops for the ISAF XI Headquarters (and sending reinforcements to western Afghanistan in support of the Spanish PRT).

¶6. (C/NF) Spain wants a seat at the grown-ups' table. It has argued for inclusion in the G-8 based on the size of its economy (though we have heard this argument less frequently in recent years). It is trying to create a role for itself in the Middle East Peace Process largely through the efforts -- some welcome by us, some not -- of former EU envoy to the Middle East, and now Spanish Foreign Minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos. It has made itself a leading voice in the EU constitution debate (Spaniards are strong EU supporters, thanks to 100 billion dollars in EU structural readjustment funds that Spain received after joining the Union in 1986. Twenty years later, in spite of boasting the world's 8th largest economy, Spain is still a net recipient of EU funds). In order to get the respect it wants, Spain will have to shoulder the responsibilities as well. This means standing up to the domestic political pressure by sending the ISAF HQ force (which would allow it to take a leadership role without exposing those troops to serious risk) and beefing up its presence in RC-West now to prevent a spring Taliban offensive from wrecking the progress that Spain has made.

¶7. (C/NF) Spanish MOD and OSD staff have recently reached agreement (yet unsigned) on a document that governs the

activities of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and USAF Office of Special Investigations (OSI) in Spain. The US committed to create such regulations in 2002, when we re-negotiated the bilateral Agreement on Defense Cooperation.

After fitful and at times unpleasant negotiations, we appear to have an agreement that provides Spain with the political cover it needs to be able to say that it controls "foreign agents" on Spanish soil while allowing our investigators to do their important force protection and criminal investigative work.

18. (C/NF) I give significant credit for resolving the NCIS/OSI issue to Minister Alonso, who has taken steps to improve the bilateral defense relationship. Alonso is a judge, former Interior Minister, and lifelong friend of Zapatero. Alonso listens closely, consults widely (asking to be briefed, for example, on the USG's view of the strategic threat presented by China), and makes reasoned decisions. Alonso has demonstrated as both Interior and Defense Minister that he values and promotes a cooperative Bilateral relationship, and that he will not stick a finger in an ally's eye to score domestic political points. He has put pro-US staff in key positions, and on the NCIS/OSI issue, told them to work with us to find a solution. He was appreciative of his meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld in October 2006 and is eager to meet you and begin a strong relationship. Alonso cannot solve all of our problems, but he and the Spanish military are part of the solution, not part of the problem.

19. (C/NF) Since coming to Madrid as Ambassador in July 2005, I've found that the key to working with my Spanish counterparts is to stay in constant contact with them. Washington leaders have also engaged frequently with Spain over the past year, implementing Secretary Rice's US-Spain strategy and making Spain a platform for the US's global agenda. Foreign Minister Moratinos and Secretary Rice recently met at the Lebanon Donors' Conference in Paris to discuss Moratinos' recent trips to the Middle East and the possibility that Secretary Rice will come to Madrid. The Spanish government is eager for Secretary Rice to visit Madrid and she has said publicly, as well as privately to both Zapatero and Moratinos, that she would like to visit by the end of the first quarter of this year.

MADRID 00000197 003 OF 003

10. (C/NF) Recent visitors to Madrid have included the Attorney General, Education Secretary Spellings, DEA Administrator Tandy, and Deputy Treasury Secretary Kimmit, Senator Martinez as well as a slew of State Department and Pentagon policymakers. Through this on-going contact, we achieved Spain's current participation in Afghanistan, continued blanket overflight clearances for Iraq and Afghanistan operations, a Spanish contribution of \$22 million to a children's cancer hospital in Basrah (a special project of the First Lady and Secretary Rice), and significant Spanish purchases of US defense articles, including the AEGIS combat system for its frigates. This government will not be our top ally in Europe, but it can be moved to participate in ways that support our common agenda. Continuous communication, outreach and contact are the key.

11. (C/NF) In this regard, I would encourage you to seriously consider the request that Minister Alonso will make for another meeting of the US high-level defense committee (HLDC). The HLDC is the policy-makers' version of the staff-level Permanent Committee, in which US and Spanish officers work side-by-side on a daily basis to implement the Agreement on Defense Cooperation. According to the ADC, the HLDC will meet on a regular basis, but it has not met since May 2005. Our relationship is too big and too broad to think that we can usefully punish Spain by withholding meetings. We are better off taking every opportunity to stay actively involved and encourage Spanish cooperation. If we ignore Spain our harvest will yield significantly less than if we

stay engaged.

¶12. (C/NF) Though the relationship will never reach the point where Presidents Bush and Zapatero would sit down together, as major Western Democracies, the US and Spain have a productive relationship that both sides need to work to maintain. You should take the opportunity of your first meeting with Alonso to express our gratitude for continued US use of Spanish bases, and our appreciation for their current role in Afghanistan. But you should impress on him that Spain will need to support the Allies in Afghanistan in a more robust fashion as it seeks to play a larger role in international deliberations, and that as Spain moves toward a "mid-term" (local and regional) electoral season in May, we should work hard together to keep key responsibilities and issues out of the domestic political fray. This will be difficult for Zapatero, who is facing opposition over his policy of seeking negotiations with the Basque terrorist group ETA, which broke a nine-month ceasefire by bombing the parking facility in Madrid's brand new international terminal, killing two people, and causing millions in damage.

Close ties and cooperation with the Zapatero government are essential to help it see that it is in its political interest and that of Spain to step up to its international responsibilities and continue to work side by side with the US in the fight against terror and the pressing security issues of the day.

Aguirre